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RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 2457
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 3053
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ASHGABAT 000198

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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: UNDP ENCOURAGES DONOR COORDINATION
AND JOINT ACTIVITIES

REF: ASHGABAT 181

Classified By: Charge Richard Miles, reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In a recent meeting, the local United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Deputy Representative mentioned her organization's "privileged access" to work with the Turkmen in some areas of Government reform. She contrasted this with the Turkmen Government's wariness about U.S. assistance in governance-related areas. She emphasized UNDP's approach of working according to the Government's timetable and raising awareness in areas where the Government is not ready to reform. A joint UNDP/EU/OHCHR human rights project will work to improve the Government's ability to address citizens' grievances, and to raise the level of human rights awareness among law enforcement officials and in the general public. If additional donor funds can be located, an electoral reform project could train candidates in local council elections on how to develop a platform and conduct a campaign. While it has a reform agenda approved by the Government, UNDP still needs resources -- and partners -- in order to carry it out. END SUMMARY.

UNDP: TURKMEN WARY OF U.S. INFLUENCE IN GOVERNANCE PROJECTS

¶2. (C) In a February 4 meeting with Political Officer, United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Deputy Resident Representative, Inita Paulovica, shared her view that UNDP has "privileged access" to carrying out reform in some sectors of the Government. She added that UNDP has told the Government that UNDP needs additional program/donor partners because the organization does not have adequate resources to implement all proposed initiatives. Paulovica frankly said that the Turkmen Government is "scared about American influence," especially the activities of U.S. NGOs in areas such as local governance, because of past events in places like Georgia and Ukraine. She urged caution about any projects involving the Open Society Institute, based on the Government's reaction to OSI's past activities in Turkmenistan. Paulovica also thought it would be difficult for the International Republican Institute (IRI) to get access here. She suggested, however, that the U.S. Government could provide expertise by sending experts to work for UNDP projects. Such involvement would "take away the political baggage," although such experts would need to abide

by the UNDP rule of "no hidden (political) agendas."

THE UNDP APPROACH IN TURKMENISTAN: PATIENCE AND TRANSPARENCY

13. (C) According to Paulovica, the Turkmen Government wants to work with UNDP because it knows how the organization works -- not pushing any party's agenda, but rather staying neutral in implementing its projects. She said the UN approach is to operate openly and transparently. While it takes time to work with the Turkmen to raise awareness about what needs to be reformed, experience has shown that it is not productive to push the Turkmen side until it is ready. According to Paulovica, in all cases this approach has paid back with interesting results. On the other hand, trying to push a hidden agenda is counterproductive, as it will eventually come to light and undermine the willingness of the Turkmen side to engage. Paulovica said UNDP has disagreed with the European Union over the EU's "conditionality approach." She argues that setting unilateral conditions for reforms, a standard practice for the programs of international financial institutions, won't work in Turkmenistan because there are no internal circumstances that compel the Turkmen to reform. In Paulovica's view, donors can most effectively exert influence here by carrying out activities together with the Turkmen and presenting a positive example.

14. (C) This approach has yielded success for UNDP, according to Paulovica, in the areas of local Government and elections, and in a self-employment program for women in Mary and Dashoguz Provinces where UNDP worked together with the

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Women's Union and provincial officials. UNDP relations with the Government have reached the point where the Turkmen Government comes to UNDP to request assistance.

UNDP/EU/OHCHR PROJECT ON HUMAN RIGHTS CONTINUES

15. (C) Paulovica described the ongoing human rights project jointly funded by UNDP, the EU and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)(reftel). She mentioned some differences between the partners, with the EU and OHCHR trying to use the project for human rights monitoring in a hidden way and their insistence on indicators. The project has three main components; capacity building to comply with reporting requirements under international human rights conventions; human rights training for law enforcement officials; and civic education and outreach on human rights. This year Turkmenistan will need to report on its compliance with the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Paulovica explained the opportunity this represents as the Turkmen need to come to terms with the international definitions of concepts such as "independent judiciary." The UNDP project will explain the elements of the international standard and how existing Turkmen legislation falls short.

16. (C) Within the framework of the human rights project, UNDP will work with the State Institute for Democracy and Human Rights to develop a master plan for implementation that identifies and prioritizes specific activities. Paulovica described IDHR Director, Shirin Ahmedova, as decisive and possessing the "full backing" of Deputy Chairman for International Relations, Rashid Meredov. According to Paulovica, Ahmedova has a good sense of which projects are politically feasible, and doesn't hesitate to say if an idea is too sensitive or premature. Paulovica also pointed out that, in working with international donors, the Turkmen Government does not want donors to take credit for the project. They themselves want to be seen as having "ownership."

ELECTORAL REFORM PROJECT LACKS FUNDING; CUT BACK

17. (C) Paulovica mentioned that 2009 UNDP funding for electoral reform was approved at a lower level than previously planned. The electoral assessment mission that

reviewed the results of the 2008 electoral reform project recommended a unified election code, improved procedures for tabulation of results, and civic education. To address the civic education aspect, UNDP would like to conduct training on preparation of electoral platforms and campaigns. It would focus on potential candidates at the local ("gengesh") level, drawn from interest groups such as women's, youth and disabled persons' organizations. However, proceeding with the project will depend on finding a funding partner(s) to supplement UNDP funds.

PARLIAMENTARY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

¶8. (C) The Government has given UNDP a green light to implement a three-year Parliamentary Development program. Paulovica said that during the the first year, UNDP will determine "how far (the Turkmen) are willing to go." She remarked that they appear to be open to assistance and are genuinely interested in understanding what role the Parliament could play. One aspect of the program will be the Parliament's role in budgetary oversight. As Paulovica described it, in the current practice, the Parliament is presented with signed contracts and has no input into the budget approval process. She said UNDP would welcome donor partners would could provide experts for this program.

¶9. (C) COMMENT: As was noted in reftel and again above, UNDP officials in country often refer to their organization's inside track on working with the Government, due, in particular, to the UN's recognition of Turkmenistan's neutral status, as well as to the organization's relatively lengthy

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in-country presence and patient approach to engagement. In the meantime, UNDP is reaching out to donors for expertise and funding that would enable it to fully implement electoral and human rights projects already approved by the Turkmen Government. END COMMENT.
MILES